8636040/2024/SEC-IV-EFS01

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Special Chief Secretary to Government

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ABSTRACT

Public Servants – A.P.Forest Department – Allegations of demand and acceptance of bribe against Sri Sodum Venugopal Babu, formerly Forest Range Officer, Chittoor East Range, Chittoor Town and District – Trapped on 13.09.2021 – Sanction of Prosecution – Orders – Issued.

ENVIRONMENT, FORESTS, SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY (SEC.IV) DEPARTMENT

G.O.Ms.No.15 **Dated:05.03.2024.**

ORDER:

Whereas, Sri Sodum Venugopal Babu worked as Forest Range Officer, Chittoor East Range, Chittoor Town and District from 18.03.2016 to 13.09.2021. By virtue of the post held by him, he falls under the category of Public Servant as defined under Section 2(c) of the Prevention of Corruption (Amendment) Act, 2018.

2. And whereas, Sri D.Bharath Kumar, S/o M.Deendayalan, 35 years, R/o Door No.15-2095, Ashokpuram, Chittoor Town, Manager of M/s.G.S.Core Crusher is the Complainant in this case.

3. And whereas, Sri D.Bharath Kumar is looking after the accounts of firms of Sri T.G.Suresh as Manager. The firm M/s.G.S.Core Crushers was registered on 23.06.2018 by Sri P.Goverthanam and Sri T.G.Suresh as partners. On 25.06.2018, Sri T.G.Suresh, one of the partners of M/s.G.S.Core Crusher applied for quarry lease for quarrying road metal & building stones to the Deputy Director of Mines & Geology, Kadapa to get the quarry lease of 4.675 hectors in Sy.No.322 of Timmepalli village, Gudipala Mandal, Chittoor District. In the process of quarry lease, the Assistant Director, Mines & Geology, Chittoor sent a letter to the Tahsildar, Gudipala Mandal on 10.08.2021 and asked the Tahsildar to furnish NOC after obtaining 'No objection report' from the Divisional Forest Officer concerned. On receiving the said letter, the Tahsildar, Gudipala Mandal wrote a letter to the Divisional Forest Officer, Chittoor East Division, Chittoor vide Roc.No.A/159/2021, dated 16.08.2021 with request for 'Forest Clearance report'. Thereafter, the Divisional Forest Officer, Chittoor East Division, Chittoor addressed a letter to the Forest Range Officer, Chittoor East Range vide RC.No.2179/2021/D, dated 02.09.2021 and directed him to conduct a Joint Inspection of the quarry lease area and submit a detailed report. Then Sri D.Bharath Kumar took the said letter from the O/o the Divisional Forest Officer, Chittoor East Division on 02.09.2021 and handed over it to Sri Venugopal Babu, Forest Range Officer, Chittoor East Range at his office on the same day who having gone through the said letter asked Sri D.Bharat Kumar to meet certain formalities and then he will attend the inspection. When

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Sri D.Bharat Kumar asked Sri Venugopal Babu, Forest Range Officer, Chittoor East Range about the formalities, he replied that he would inform later. Then Sri Venugopal Babu, Forest Range Officer, Chittoor East Range instructed his staff to attend the inspection of the area. On 03.09.2021, when Sri D.Bharath Kumar went to the O/o the Forest Range Officer, Sri Venugopal Babu, Forest Range Officer, Chittoor East Range sent his staff Sri R.Sallauddin, Forest Section Officer and Sri R.Madhu, Forest Beat Officer for site inspection. Accordingly, they visited Timmepalli village along with Sri D.Bharath Kumar, verified the site and noted down the details. At about 12.30 P.M., when Sri D.Bharath Kumar met Sri Venugopal Babu, Forest Range Officer, Chittoor East Range and examined about his work, Sri Venugopal Babu, Forest Range Officer, Chittoor East Range asked him to come on 06.09.2021 by the time, the sketch will be ready. Accordingly, on 06.09.2021 morning at 10.30 A.M., Sri D.Bharath Kumar visited the FRO Office, met Sri Venugopal Babu, Forest Range Officer, Chittoor East Range who asked him to come in the evening and accordingly, Sri D.Bharath Kumar went to the office of Forest Range Officer at 04.00 P.M., and when enquired about his work, Sri Venugopal Babu, Forest Range Officer, Chittoor East Range demanded to pay a bribe of Rs.3.5 lakhs for giving the Inspection Report. When Sri D.Bharath Kumar requested stating that it is huge amount, Sri Venugopal Babu, Forest Range Officer, Chittoor East Range reduced the bribe to Rs.2.5 lakhs. Again on 07.09.2021 morning at about 10.00 A.M., Sri D.Bharath Kumar went to the O/o Forest Range Officer and when requested to complete his work, Sri Venugopal Babu, Forest Range Officer, Chittoor East Range asked Sri D.Bharath Kumar to come in the evening with bribe amount. When Sri D.Bharath Kumar informed the same to Sri T.G.Suresh who instructed Sri D.Bharath Kumar to get the conversation of demand of bribe recorded. Accordingly, on 07.09.2021 at about 04.00 P.M., Sri D.Bharath Kumar went to the office of Forest Range Officer and enquired about his work. Sri Venugopal Babu, Forest Range Officer reiterated his demand of bribe Rs.2.5 lakhs. On repeated requested by Sri D.Bharath Kumar, Sri Venugopal Babu, Forest Range Officer, Chittoor East Range finally reduced the bribe amount to Rs.2.0 lakhs and informed that he will complete the entire work by getting 'Forest Clearance report' from the Divisional Forest Officer. Sri D.Bharath Kumar got recorded the said voice conversation in his VIVO Phone memory card of Sandisk 4 GB. When Sri D.Bharath Kumar informed the same to his owner Sri T.G.Suresh i.e., about the final demand of bribe of Rs.2.0 lakhs by Sri Venugopal Babu, Forest Range Officer, Chittoor East Range, Sri T.G.Suresh directed Sri D.Bharath Kumar to file a complaint against Sri Venugopal Babu, Forest Range Officer, Chittoor East Range in ACB as they are unwilling to pay the demanded bribe amount to him. On 11.09.2021 at 5.00 P.M., Sri D.Bharath Kumar lodged complaint to the Deputy Superintendent of Police, Anti-Corruption Bureau, Tirupati along with the two memory cards containing the voice conversations for necessary action.

4. And whereas, after due verification, the Deputy Superintendent of Police, Anti-Corruption Bureau, Tirupati registered the said report as a case in Cr.No.6/RCT-TCT/2021 U/sec 7 of Prevention of Corruption (Amendment) Act, 2018 on 13.09.2021 at 07.20 hours and proposed to lay a trap against Sri Sodum Venugopal Babu, Forest Range Officer, Chittoor East Range, Chittoor District.

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5. And whereas, during the investigation, the Deputy Superintendent of Police, Anti-Corruption Bureau, Tirupati got conducted Pre-Trap proceedings on 13.09.2021 from 10.45 hours to 13.45 hours in the presence of two independent official mediators and staff. While the Pre-Trap Proceedings are in progress, at about 13-35 hours, Sri D.Bharath Kumar received a phone call from Sri Venugopal Babu, Forest Range Officer and had conversation with him on speaker mode. In the said conversation, Sri Venugopal Babu, Forest Range Officer, Chittoor East Range asked Sri D.Bharath Kumar to come to his office by 4.00 P.M. evening.

6. And whereas, Accordingly, the trap party left to the O/o Forest Range Officer, Chittoor (East). After alighting ACB vehicle Sri D.Bharath Kumar went into the chamber of Forest Range Officer, Chittoor East Range who was sitting in his chair. When Sri D.Bharath Kumar asked about his pending file Sri Venugopal Babu, Forest Range Officer, Chittoor East Range showed his file on the table and asked him whether he had brought the amount of Rs.2,00,000/- and when Sri D.Bharath Kumar replied positively, Sri Venugopal Babu, Forest Range Officer, Chittoor East Range informed him that he will sign and forward the file after handing over the demanded bribe amount. Then Sri D.Bharath Kumar took the tainted currency of Rs.2,00,000/- from his pant's right side pocket and gave it to Sri Venugopal Babu, Forest Range Officer, Chittoor East Range. Sri Venugopal Babu, Forest Range Officer, Chittoor East Range took the tainted currency with his right hand and kept the same in his pant's right side front pocket and assured Sri D.Bharath Kumar that his file will be send to Divisional Forest Officer. Having received the signal from Sri D.Bharath Kumar the trap party rushed into and Sri Venugopal Babu, Forest Range Officer, Chittoor East Range was trapped at his office chamber on 13.09.2021 at 04.50 P.M., when he demanded and accepted the bribe amount of Rs.2,00,000/- from Sri D.Bharath Kumar. The chemical test conducted on the right hand fingers of Sri Sodum Venugopal Babu, yielded positive results. When questioned Sri Venugopal Babu, Forest Range Officer, Chittoor East Range took out the bribe amount of Rs.2,00,000/- from his pant's right side front pocket. The serial numbers & denominations of recovered currency notes were found tallied with those of the serial numbers & denominations of the currency notes noted in the Pre-Trap Proceedings. The chemical test conducted on the inner linings of the pants right side front pocket of Sri Venugopal Babu, Forest Range Officer, Chittoor East Range yielded positive results. The Deputy Superintendent of Police seized the tainted bribe amount, resultant solutions, sample of S.C.Powder and pants of Sri Venugopal Babu, Forest Range Officer, Chittoor East Range under post Trap-Proceedings. The Deputy Superintendent of Police seized the relevant records connected to the official favour under a cover of Mediator Report. As a prima-facie case made out against the Sri Venugopal Babu, Forest Range Officer, Chittoor East Range, the Deputy Superintendent of Police, Anti-Corruption Bureau, Tirupati arrested him on 14.09.2021 and produced before the Hon'ble Special Judge for SPE & ACB Cases, Nellore, who remanded him to judicial custody. During the investigation, relevant witnesses were examined and connected documents were collected which substantiate the allegations.

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7. And whereas, the above said acts of Sri Sodum Venugopal Babu who worked as a Forest Range Officer, Chittoor East Range, Chittoor Town and District constitute offences punishable U/sec 7(a) of Prevention of Corruption (Amendment) Act, 2018.

8. And whereas, the Government of Andhra Pradesh being the competent authority to remove the said Sri Sodum Venugopal Babu, Forest Range Officer, Chittoor East Range, Chittoor Town and District from the Government service, after fully and carefully examining the material placed before them i.e., FIR, Mediators Reports-I & II and Final Investigation Report of the Director General, Anti-Corruption Bureau, A.P., Vijayawada which contains the gist of statements of witnesses and the contents of the documents in respect of the said allegations and having regard to the facts and circumstances of the case, consider that Sri Sodum Venugopal Babu, worked as Forest Range Officer, Chittoor East Range, Chittoor Town and District should be prosecuted in the Court of Law for the aforesaid offence.

9. Now, therefore, in exercise of the powers conferred under clause (b) of sub-section (1) of Section 19 of the Prevention of Corruption (Amendment) Act, 2018, the Government of Andhra Pradesh hereby accord sanction for the prosecution of the said Sri Sodum Venugopal Babu, Forest Range Officer, Chittoor East Range, Chittoor Town and District for the offences punishable under section 7(a) of Prevention of Corruption (Amendment) Act, 2018 and for any other cognate offences punishable under any other provisions of law for the time being in force in respect of the aforesaid acts and for taking cognizance of the said offence by a Court of competent jurisdiction.

(BY ORDER AND IN THE NAME OF THE GOVERNOR OF ANDHRA PRADESH)

NEERABH KUMAR PRASAD
SPECIAL CHIEF SECRETARY TO GOVERNMENT

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To
The Director General,
Anti-Corruption Bureau,
Andhra Pradesh, Vijayawada.